Check List the journal of biodiversity data

BOOK REVIEWS

Check List 11(3): 1638, April 2015 doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.15560/11.3.1638
ISSN 1809-127X © 2015 Check List and Authors

Flowering Plants of the Western Ghats, India

Flowering Plants of the Western Ghats, India by T. S. Nayar, A. Rasiya Beegam and M. Sibi. 2014. Thiruvananthapuram, India: Jawaharlal Nehru Tropical Botanic Garden and Research Institute. 1683 + i–x + i–vi pp., in 2 volumes. ISBN 978-81-920098-2-7 and ISBN 978-81-920098-3-4.

The citation of protologues and type specimens is a common practice in traditional Floras irrespective of their geographical context. Furthermore, such Floras also provide an intricate nomenclature, elaborate technical descriptions, illustrations, economic utilities, lists of specimens collected/examined for every taxon, and identification keys, which are sometimes difficult to use, especially by non-taxonomists. However, provincial Floras published prior to Indian independence continue as often "referred publications" for plant identifications.

The Biodiversity Convention and the Conference of Parties of the Convention adopted a Strategic Action Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020 to support biodiversity conservation and increased awareness of conservation in the general public. Since then, there has been a demand for information on plants, their names, distribution, ecology, utility aspects, rarity, and conservation status. Conventional Floras, which usually bring exclusively taxonomic information, fail to provide data on these aspects.

The biogeographic zone of the Western Ghats is a 1,600 km long mountain range covering the states of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu. The Ghats are currently a biodiversity hotspot; they harbor a distinctive biodiversity with a high degree of endemism. Furthermore, the region harbors two Biosphere Reserves, 15 National Parks, 52 Wild Life Sanctuaries, and nine Tiger Reserves. Ecological and conservation issues differ throughout the Ghats because the mountains pass through six states with people of multi-linguistic and multi-cultural backgrounds.

The authors of *Flowering Plants of Western Ghats, India* have made an extraordinary effort in surveying the literature about the flora of the Western Ghats and presented a comprehensive inventory of plants occurring in that region. The Flora is very much relevant because 44% of the flowering plants of India are represented in the Western Ghats. This Flora can support decisions to protect the plants, ecosystems, and landscapes in the region. Authors appropriately avoided words such as "checklist" or "flora" in the title for obvious reasons and presented data in an easily referable format. The work differs from conventional Floras in several ways. All authors are trained taxonomists, but avoided including excessive technical terminology. While striving to be precise, authors stick to the format choosing fields of general interest, applicability, and relevance to floral inventory and conservation. Each species account

contains current accepted name, synonym, description, illustration, local names, and economic uses. The work deals with 7,402 species (23,000 scientific names) from 1,480 genera and 210 families. A huge number of vernacular names (13,000) and their indexing are included at the end of the book. The volume of work is easily perceivable by looking at its 3,000 supporting references and their multiple citing under different names. It makes reference to many Floras where the name of a given species is treated as a correct name/synonym. Normal-bold fonts are used in case of referring to correct names, while italicized fonts are used for synonyms. Comprehensive description and good illustrations of every species were quoted from references to give a full appraisal on every species. The two volumes, with continued pagination, are about 1,700 pages and present data from the literature on a number

of issues for 8,080 species (Also included are species of doubtful occurrence). This is truly an achievement, for Floras in general, usually handle 500–600 species in about 500 pages. Furthermore, this Flora enhances the usage of other pre-existing small (district) and large (state) Floras of the Western Ghats, as the data are drawn from all of them selectively. As a convention, the authors have avoided giving species authority in case of infra-specific taxa, which are represented only by sub species or varieties.

One of the downsides of this work is that one should use both volumes for consulting any name, because references cited under each name and also the index for both scientific names and vernacular names appears only in the second volume. However, the work stands as a great reference for all the Western Ghats' plants with much supporting literature. But (and I wish so!), if such a database gets translated into a searchable one, linked to supporting references, it would stand as an important contribution for the Western Ghats plants for years to come. The book definitely will be a useful reference to foresters, academics, researchers, and administrators working in this important biogeographic region. All libraries are worth owning it to connect academic institutions engaged in plant inventory and conservation research.

P. Venu
Botanical Survey of India,
Deccan Regional Centre,
Hyderabad, India
E-mail: pvenu.bsi@gmail.com